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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5366

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SUBJECT: DELHI DIARY, APRIL 26-MAY 4

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1B. NEW DELHI 2101

Classified By: Acting PolCouns Atul Keshap for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

11. (U) Below is a compilation of political highlights from Embassy New Delhi for April 26-May 4, 2007 that did not feature in our other reporting, including:

-- Indian Boots on the Ground in Afghanistan?
-- Parliamentary Histrionics Play On
-- Bhutanese Refugees Want To Participate In Election
-- MEA Not Big Enough for Its Britches

Indian Boots on the Ground in Afghanistan?

12. (C) Media reports April 24-25 indicating that the Indian Army was planning to send a team of eight army officers to Kabul in May to teach Afghan National Army (ANA) troops and officers to "read, write and speak in English," as well as to train them in weapons handling, map craft and fundamental battalion procedures were taken out of context, according to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and DAO sources (see reftel a). The press quoted "defense sources" as stating that the decision to send the officers followed a request from the MEA. The team was to include four officers from the Army Education Corps, responsible for operating the Indian Army's own basic military education programs, according to "The Telegraph." Local news outlet NDTV reported that a similar training group would be deployed to Uzbekistan in the next six months.

13. (C) Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) (Afghanistan) Under Secretary Smita Pant told PolOff April 26 that the media reports had been a surprise to her, and that, although the Government of India (GOI) had been conducting English language training as part of their educational efforts in Afghanistan, the GOI was "not in any way involved in training the Afghan National Army." Only civil institutions were involved in teaching English in Afghanistan, she said, adding, "our involvement in Afghanistan is restricted to reconstruction and development." The MEA made a formal statement the same day, declaring, "defense establishments in India hold training programs from time to time for military

personnel from other countries, including Afghanistan. However, there is no proposal to send Indian Army personnel to Afghanistan for training the Afghan army." Incoming MEA Joint Secretary for Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, T.C.A. Raghavan, however, confirmed to PolCouns May 1 (see ref b) that some Army Education Corps instructors were going to Afghanistan to teach English to ANA troops, but clarified that the program involved no infantry training.

14. (C) However, Ministry of Defense sources validated the media reports to the DAO, stating that eight to twelve English language instructors from the Army Education Corps Language School were indeed going to Afghanistan to train ANA and Government of Afghanistan officials as part of a an assistance package funded by the MEA.

15. (SBU) Comment: This story was not heavily reported in the media, but outlets that did carry it were somewhat alarmist, calling the prospect of an Indian Army presence in Afghanistan "a shift to a higher gear," and "a step-up for India in its involvement in Afghanistan, where it has so far refused to put boots on the ground." According to NDTV, former Director General of Military Intelligence Lt. General R.K. Sawhney, said, "This decision will send a wrong signal in the neighborhood. India can do whatever it wants in reconstruction of war-ravaged Afghanistan, but to send even a small training team is fraught with dangers. Pakistan will instigate the Taliban against us, and even Iran will not take it kindly." We will keep seeking confirmation of India's intentions. End comment.

16. (SBU) Though the budget is expected to be passed by both
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houses by May 5, this has not prevented Members of Parliament (MP) from indulging in their usual political antics and attacks. Congress and the Left parties accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of human trafficking, following the recent arrest of a BJP MP for people smuggling. They also called for the resignation of Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, after the press reported that Gujarat police murdered innocent Muslims in encounter killings, and protested the BJP release of a scurrilous anti-Muslim CD during Uttar Pradesh elections.

17. (SBU) On April 30, the BJP walked out to protest the CPI (M) government's role in the death of farmers in Nandigram, West Bengal. BJP MPs also repeated accusations that the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government is not sufficiently committed to fighting terrorism, protesting alleged UPA complacency regarding the presence of Lashkar e Taiba elements at a recent Srinagar rally.

18. (SBU) Not to be left out, regional parties joined the chaos, loudly demanding quotas for Other Backward Castes (OBCs) in government funded higher education institutions, including the Indian Institutes of Technology and Management.

19. (SBU) Comment: Despite the many important topics demanding attention, including foreign direct investment, inflation, Special Economic Zones, and the impact of global warming on India's agrarian economy, Indian MPs continue to indulge in political theater. Parliament is now considering whether it should adjourn in early May before Uttar Pradesh election results are announced. It is doubtful that Parliament will consider any substantive business after passage of the budget. End Comment.

Bhutanese Refugees Want To Participate In Election

110. (U) In Nepal, representatives of the thousands of Bhutanese expelled by the Bhutanese Government in the 1990s have petitioned the King of Bhutan for the right of the exiled refugees to participate in the upcoming election.

Thinley Penjore, the spokesman for the National Front for Democracy (NFD), an umbrella front of three exiled Bhutanese political parties, sent a statement to King Jigme Khesar Namgyel April 19 to urge him to include refugees in the general election.

MEA Not Big Enough for Its Britches

11. (U) Recent press reports indicate that Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon told a Parliamentary panel the GOI was considering doubling the size of the MEA over the next five years, including the Indian Foreign Service, which currently has less than 700 people. "For every Indian diplomat, there are four Brazilian diplomats; for every Indian diplomat, there are seven Chinese diplomats. Now we might be wonderful and very efficient, but we are not that efficient or that good. It's really a problem...the strain is telling on us," said Menon, according to "The Times of India." India has joined thirteen new multilateral organizations in the past ten years and its overall budget has tripled, yet MEA's personnel has shrunk from 4,866 to 4,746, according to "The Hindu." Menon reportedly said the GOI was also planning to increase its posts in the Gulf countries to handle visa and consular affairs and better serve its 3 million-strong diaspora in the region. A shuffling of responsibilities within the MEA is coming down the pike as well, and the protocol division may be facing outsourcing to the Indian hospitality sector, according to press reports. If true, we will miss the greasy, weak tea, Britannia biscuits, and stale cashews.

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